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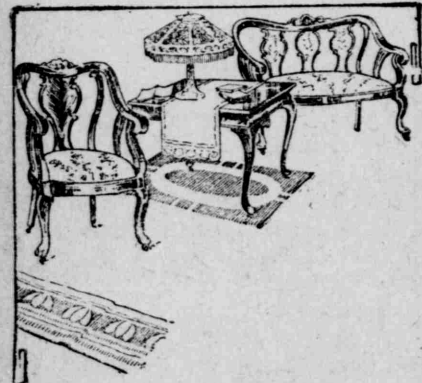
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### BOB-FOR-SHORT'S Christmas



OW, our baby had never encountered a locked door. The lovesome pit-pat of his busy feet was herald at whose coming every door in the house swung open and over thresholds he went into assured welcomes.

But we were planning a tree. And the library door was locked. He paused in his ascent of the stairs to button in a button that would not stay buttoned. It required much time and he sat down on the step and with all his ten fat, wee fingers labored. Then, "Das a doodle boy," he obfuscated himself as, he resumed his climb of the stairs, the button buttoned; "Das a daryin' yittle gentleman!"

He shook the knob. Waited, juggling on the toes of him and discoursing to Nicodemus.

The door remained closed. Two fat palms smote it wrathfully. "Open," he commanded; "pease open dis door."

Nobody answered. "P-o-o-r yittle boy," he wheeled at keyhole; "zere ain't nobody loves 'im."

Nicodemus yapped and made feints at desertion when a dog barked outside. Fawned back, and licked the fingers where bread and honey aroma lingered. Sat up and waved an affable paw at him.

He sat down on the floor and gathered his yellow dog into his pinafore and hugged.

"Cept Nicodemus an' mysself," he said. Great-grand came up the hall. "Is you been a bad boy, dreat-dran?" he said. "Is you all shut out?"

Great-grand sighed. "Seems like this horse just will run away," in doleful tone, "and I've got a bone in my foot and I can't run after him."

In a wink he was after the rampant steed. Captured and mounted, rode it lordly hither and yon, and when at last he came back from the breathless miles we had slipped down the back way and at stairfoot waited.

Slowly, with dignity, he dismounted, put his steed in stall, came back to stair-head, and, legs astride and head thrown back, surveyed us from the heights of remembered injury. Beside him, perky, tongue lolling out, Nicodemus squatted.

Long legs gathered to his chin, great-grand ranged himself on the top step and twinkled. "Yes, sirs," quoth great-grand; "shutted us all out!"

Our baby nodded confirmation and Nicodemus yawned in our faces. "Me'n mys Nicodemus an' mys dreat-dran," he said. "An mys dreat-dran is dot a bone in his foot an' I needed to kiss mys muvver."

But for three long days the library door remained locked. And regularly, after each morning's breakfast, he mounted the stairs and tried the knob and cogitated to Nicodemus, and poked broom straws under the door.

Christmas eve we sat about a great open fire. Great-grand loved to dig and delve in the red-charred logs and imprison the swarms of rosy bees. Fascinated, I would watch the swirling uplifted sparks, wondering what phantasms of youth he saw all-beautiful in them, what faces went past in that rosy mirage that his own should wear so tender an answering look into eyes he alone was seeing. Sometimes our baby would come to stand between his knees, head leaned against his shoulder, and from within the encircling arms watch. Sometimes he would straddle one old knee and snug his head under the down-leaning old chin, gold hair and white hair commingled, and hand over the old hand, help the poker that prodded and piled the embers. And the wide eyes seemed to be seeing with the old man's vision, so united he would sit.

Christmas eve we sat about the great open fireplace. Great-grand sort of and piled his red-charred logs. Grandmother was watching, lost in idleness. Grand father had gone down cellar for apples and in my lap my baby was telling me secrets. We listened beyond the singings of the flames; beyond the delicate soft singing and the sighing and the laughter of them, the wind in the chimney. From the end of the new back-log the saps distilled, all the summer's rains and dews and green growings in their whicker-whicker. We had hated to shut out the skies, so divinely near they closed in upon earth, with their starry strands garlanding the rim of hills. Our baby had seen his first meteor—a feathered trail of ethereal fire and a soundless splendor as the meteor burst and bigged into a globe of slyian azure, and went out. And the black violet skies seemed yet deeper black with that blue glory memoried against them, and the stars pallid and cold. And my baby wondered if there might not be another Christmas baby, in that blue glory. He wondered whether, if we'd go out, we might not find a few boys and girls and babies that got left over, when God forgot who had asked to have some left at their houses. He wished he'd been there that night at the oxen's inn, to see the little child. So's

he could have brought it home to his own self's house. He wanted a baby so bad. And even his sweets-freighted babble picked up that blue sky-mystery and wondered about it. And his eyes were wide and fathomlessly sweet in the firelight, and his hand clung all the while to my face and deared it, and wove heavenly weave into my life in every least little touches of it to my lips, my cheeks, and in the comings home of it to slip into my bosom and there nest.

Then we told him that it was going to be the Christmas baby's birthday tomorrow, and because we so love God's little son we give, year after year, all life long, gifts to him and to each other on that day. And the library door, tomorrow, would be unlocked, and a surprise inside for us each and all.

"Dracious!" was his sole comment; and slowly the happy eyes slipped from us behind their curtain-fringes, the little warm body lay heavy in my arms. Slowly Great-grand unbuilted the house of red embers, and coming over took the little sleeper into his arms, rocked and crooned and hugged and God-blessed him. And with grandmother's kisses on the wee feet that never were still save in slumber, and grandfather's proud look into the unwitting face following after, I bore him away to his crib; so loved, so loved!

"Is Trismus tum?" I wakened with the words breaking the crystal of my dreams and kissing themselves against my lips and a fat white body embracing my head. "Yes, sir," I managed to say through the strangling arms of him. "Happy Christmas, Bob-for-Short!"

"Happy Christmas, Bob-for-Short!" echoed from the doorway; and "Hap-



He Had Never Owned a Kitten.

py Christmas, Bob-for-Short!" floated in from beyond the east and west shoulders of great-grand.

He shouted. He danced. Never before had he been met by all the family at crib-side. He jiggled all over the bed, trickling blarneyments and laughter at the three gray heads that waggled in unconscious tune to the prancings of him.

Then, all his yellow body apart with haste, Nicodemus hustled his fat self up the stairs into the fun he was missing, and in his wake, Katy from her kitchen.

And with a "Happy Christmas to yez, Mither Bob-for-Short," she set a gray kitten on the floor.

We were all very still, as he slipped from the bed and approached the kitten. He had never owned a kitten. He eyed it in raptured silence. "Meou," said the kitten.

Into his cheeks the red crimsoned. "Oh!" he gasped; "wad you tail, titty; 'pease wad you tail!" And she wagged her tail and arched her back against his feet and cajoled him, and as he gathered her into his nightgown and the white fat bare legs ran with their treasure, she broke into loud silken purrings. And Nicodemus sulked and fell into a helpless yellow bunch of protest, when the gray kitten was held to his nose for a kiss.

And we all dawdled until Katy's bell rang third summons to breakfast. He went up the stairs alone. Then Nicodemus. Then Great-grand. Then I. And then the rest of his adorers.

He stopped at the door. "Open the door, sir," said grandfater.

"Tum on, muvver," he said, reaching hand into my hand.

So we stepped over the threshold together.

The room was darkened. The firelight dulled behind a screen. In the center of the room a low, fair-branched young cedar tree gleamed like a great jewel.

My hand forgotten, he circled the tree.

"Round and 'round. And we after. 'Das a mo' bu-ti-ful drum," we caught the murmur as he inventoried. "Das a yittle 'tend horse." He paused to jog it and in ecstasy watch its tail go up and down. "Das a yittle toad-frod in dat bid marble. How you s'pose it dot in?" He tarried to investigate, and set it rolling for the kitten to chase. Nicodemus thought it was meant for him, and when he collided with the kitten, cowed and scared and muttering, he fled to a distance and yapped at ball and kitten.

And the inventory went on: "Das a doid waths, yike mys Dreat-dran is dot." He tarried to hunt a pocket, and deposit his watch therein. But first he held it to ear. And the murmur resumed: "Dat waths is def an' dum, too. Das a picture-but an' das a picture-but an' das a picture-but. . . . Dracious!"

And Christmas was on for Bob-for-Short.—New York Independent.